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ABSTRACT

Ford Foundation support for resident and regional theater has followed two main lines: strengthening key theaters as institutions and furnishing opportunities to individual artists for professional advancement. This report describes some of the activities that have been aided by the foundation and notes the types of aid provided. The activities described include the following: activities of resident theaters, experimental theaters, and minority theaters; travel and study programs undertaken by individual directors, actors, playwrights, designers, administrators, and critics; efforts to promote communication among theaters; and the opening of television to quality drama. The report discusses the future of the theater in the United States and provides an itemized list of the amounts of assistance provided by the foundation to theaters and artists. (GW)

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THEATER REAWAKENING

A Report on Ford Foundation Assistance to American Drama

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Sir Tyrone Guthrie's 1963 production of *The Three Sisters* at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. No seat in the thrust stage theater is farther than 52 feet from stage center.

BACKDROP

For most of the first half of the twentieth century the American theater was dominated by Broadway. In the early decades, but less frequently as the years passed, audiences in communities beyond New York City generally saw what had already succeeded commercially along the Great White Way. Eventually the number of traveling companies and resident professional groups dwindled, and plays seen in most towns and cities were performed primarily by local amateurs.

There were some attempts between the two world wars to develop theaters that would offer both professionals and audiences an alternative to the purely commercial hit-or-flop approach of Broadway. But most of these were centered in New York City. They included the Provincetown Players, which drew heavily on the talents of Eugene O'Neill; the Washington Square Players, which later became the Theatre Guild; the Group Theater; and the Civic Repertory Company of Eva Le Gallienne.

During the Depression, the Federal Theatre of the government's Works Progress Administration made an ambitious attempt to create a national theater. It financed more than 1,200 productions throughout the country in the four years of its existence, but died when federal money was cut off. Otherwise, theater in larger towns and cities was offered primarily by more than a thousand community groups, many of them in what came to be known as the "little theater" movement. A few local companies, including the Cleveland Play House and the Barter Theatre in Virginia, received national

attention, but even these generally offered little more than warmed-over Broadway hits. Some theaters tried to pay their actors and develop a professional troupe, but few could afford union scale. The ~~Baxter~~ Theatre was so named because it supported a professional company by accepting food and other items instead of cash payment for admission.

But if the local groups were neither fully professional nor especially daring in what they produced, they did manage to keep theater alive. Many individuals who moved on to contribute significantly to the national scene received valuable training in these local theaters. In the early 1930's, for example, the young members of a summer company on Cape Cod included James Stewart, Henry Fonda, Margaret Sullavan, Joshua Logan, Mildred Natwick, and Myron McCormick.

The members of a few of these local groups also nurtured a dream that a theater could be a social and cultural force in a community if it were a permanent institution acting as an alternative, not an adjunct, to the commercial theater. The dream began to assume real dimensions shortly after World War II. A few individuals in such diverse places as Dallas, Houston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco started small theaters that turned out to be the nucleus of a national movement—resident, professional, noncommercial theater—a movement that has profoundly affected the course of American theater over the last two decades. This movement, assisted by the Ford Foundation, began with the random appearance of a few professional theaters and became a more nearly coordinated force with the creation in 1961 of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), a national organization providing a variety of artistic, managerial, and informational services (described in detail on page 29).

Before the Decline

If the first half of the twentieth century seemed to indicate a decline in the scope of the American theater, this decline followed what had been a most active period, when nearly every crossroads town had its own theater. At the turn of the century, some 20,000 actors were touring in nearly 400 plays in an annual ritual that brought theatrical magic to some 2,000 cities, towns, and hamlets.

Theater thrived on the road then, and the actors prospered. Such performers as Dustin Farnum, James O'Neill (father of Eugene), Maude Adams, William S. Hart, the Barrymores, George M. Cohan and Lillian Russell could be seen widely. Earlier still, Edwin Booth, at the age of fifty-five and with his health failing, had made \$250,000 in the 1887-88 season by giving 258 performances of several Shakespearean plays in seventy-two stands, forty-eight of them one-nighters.

The American theater had come a long way since an amateur group was jailed in Accomac, Virginia, in 1665 for performing *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb*. Theatrical productions in this country were once considered a grave threat to moral health, and actors performed at their peril. "We arrived in Charles-Town full of Lice, Shame, Poverty, Nakedness, and Hunger," wrote Anthony Aston, a professional actor, in 1702.

But the thirst for live theater could not be quenched. The first permanent American theater was built in 1716 in Williamsburg, capital of colonial Virginia. Soon two parallel traditions developed:

- more or less permanent groups of actors performing in the same places over extended periods of time, which gave birth to the concept of resident professional theaters.
- traveling stock companies, which were a more sophisticated version of the strolling players who first brought theater to this country from England.

The automobile and motion pictures brought the golden theatrical age of the nineteenth and early twentieth century to a halt. The automobile, in addition to providing access to more varied forms of entertainment, enable people to travel some distance to see plays, thus limiting audiences for such local productions as were available. Furthermore, stars of the theater signed on to make films, and other actors drifted to Broadway and the fringes of the film industry in Los Angeles. Theater in most towns and cities if it existed at all, was left in the hands of amateurs.

The movement that replaced the amateur theater following World War II—known as either resident or regional theater—has established the theater as a valid institution providing a community service which not only entertains but also comments on and interprets society. Ford Foundation support for this movement followed two main lines: strengthening key theaters as institutions, and furnishing opportunities to individual artists for professional advancement.

Although resident theaters have played a major role in the resurgence of theatrical activity—during the past thirty years, other forms of theater have also been important. The Foundation, while paying particular attention to resident theater, also has provided support for:

- experimental theater activities, primarily in New York City;
- theaters developed by minority group members to give expression to their life and heritage and to provide training in the theater arts;
- efforts to promote communication and cooperation among theaters;
- the opening of television, especially public television, to quality drama.

This report describes these activities.

William Ball directing the American
Conservatory Theater's production
of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Are Dead*.



THE RESIDENT THEATER

The dream of all serious theatre in the United States in the middle of our Twentieth Century is the establishment of a national theatre.

Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round

The modern resident theater, for all its debt to Accomac, Williamsburg, Provincetown, and other ventures in between, marks its beginning with Margo Jones and Dallas.

By the time Margo Jones began Theatre '47 in Dallas in 1947 (the number in the name changed with each succeeding year), she had worked in community theaters, run a Federal Theatre outlet, taught at the University of Texas, and directed on Broadway.

"I want to live in a golden age when there is great theatre everywhere," she declared. What she wanted for her theater, and what has since become the goal of similar efforts elsewhere, she described as a "permanent, professional, repertory native theatre with a staff of the best young artists in America; a theatre that will be a true playwright's theatre; a theatre that will give the young playwrights . . . a chance to be seen; a theatre that will provide the classics and the best new scripts with a chance for good production. . . a theatre to mean even more to America than the Moscow Art meant to Russia, the Abbey to Ireland, or the Old Vic to England; a theatre that will carry on, but adapt to our country and time, the ideas of the Stanislavskis, the Copeaus, the Craigs; a theatre of our time."

In the first year Margo Jones presented four new plays and one classic. Her first production was a play by William Inge that he later refashioned for Broadway as *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. Tennessee Williams chose her theater for the premier of *Summer and Smoke*, and she discovered Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, who gave

her *Inherit the Wind*. Margo Jones died suddenly in 1955 at the age of forty-one, and her theater, unable to survive without her leadership, closed four years later. The Dallas Theater had produced seventy-six new plays in all, and its founder is remembered through the Margo Jones Award, given each year for distinguished contributions to the theater, resident or commercial.

In the same year that the Dallas theater was founded, Nina Vance started a group in Houston called the Alley Theatre. In 1950, Zelda Fichandler founded the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Two years later Jules Irving and Herbert Blau began a company in San Francisco and named it the Actor's Workshop. The Actor's Workshop initially was the most adventurous of these new theaters, presenting plays by such European playwrights, then relatively unknown in the United States, as Pinter, Beckett, Brecht, and Genet. But together, especially after the demise of the Dallas theater, these three groups represented the solid base on which the resident theater movement was built.

The elements forming these and subsequent theaters followed closely the pattern defined by Margo Jones:

- emulation of such famous European theaters as the Berliner Ensemble, the Comédie Française, the Moscow Art Theater, Ireland's Abbey, and England's Old Vic by means of a permanent, professional company;

- plays performed consecutively, each for a few weeks only, differing from the European concept of repertory, in which a number of plays are performed in a rotating sequence during a season;

- a combination of new and classic plays;

- the nurturing of artists, with emphasis initially on directors.

Perhaps the significant factor common to all these theaters was that each owed its creation to the almost fanatical determination of a single driving talent. Nina Vance began with a budget of \$2.14: the cost in 1947 of sending postcards to 214 people who might be interested in starting a theater in Houston; Zelda Fichandler borrowed \$15,000 and began the Arena Stage in a rented movie house. The Actor's Workshop operated on weekends in a loft, and most of its actors were part-time professionals, not always by choice but because the box office receipts were rarely enough to pay salaries. When the actor Robert Symonds joined the company, for example, he supplemented his \$7.50 weekly salary with a job in a wholesale fruit market.

The Ford Foundation, having established a program in the arts in 1957, examined these and other activities in an effort to identify the needs of the American theater and the artists working in it. The Foundation found a strong interest in an alternative to Broadway, and accordingly, designed a program based on the belief that permanent

resident companies devoted to theater as an artistic rather than a commercial resource could serve as the primary vehicle for serious American drama. (Or, as Jules Irving once said, "I don't want to be doing *Mary, Mary* when the Bomb drops.")

The Program had three priorities:

- provision of opportunities for talented artists and other professionals, from earliest training to the period of mature accomplishment; —strengthening of key outlets—companies, groups, institutions—for professional careers;

- creation of networks for communication among artists and artistic directors, both to reduce their isolation and to focus and shape their efforts at artistic development.

Do the Actors Mean It?

If resident theaters were to develop as artistic institutions, they needed to attract experienced professionals. Many such, however, looked on any theater outside Los Angeles or New York as little more than a diversion for local dilettantes. "Everywhere in the country they are crying 'repertory,'" said one theater observer. "The real question is, do the actors mean it enough to leave New York?"

To be sure, leaving New York or Los Angeles could be—and still is—a major problem for actors, playwrights, directors, designers, and other professionals. It is in these centers that they can find work—and, they hope, the fame and fortune that the stage, films, and television have to offer. There, too, are concentrated the agents, producers, and media that can arrange such rewards.

Resident theaters in the late 1950s had to convince professionals on both coasts that a journey to the interior was not a one-way trip to oblivion, and that it might even lead to professional rewards. To achieve such credibility they offered Margo Jones's concept of a theater devoted to a full range of classic plays and new plays in a single season. This gave performers the opportunity to test themselves in everything from Greek tragedy to light comedy, echoing the days when theatergoers from Chicago to Tombstone, Arizona, could enjoy a regular diet of *Hamlet*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Ten Nights in a Barroom*. Resident theaters also offered the promise of a full season's work, a definite advantage for artists used to jobs for a few weeks in road shows or out-of-town productions, or weeks of rehearsals for a show that might close after opening night.

To test the ability of resident theaters to attract and hold a company of experienced actors beyond a single production, the Foundation made grants in 1959 to the Arena Stage in Washington, the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Actor's Workshop in San Francisco, and the Phoenix Theater in New York. The grants, when matched by the

theaters, provided \$200 weekly salaries for ten actors in each company over seasons ranging from forty to fifty-two weeks. The grants were for three years (except for the Phoenix, which remained in the program for only one year).

These theaters were able for the first time to attract and hold a nucleus of professional performers on seasonal contracts. The presence of these actors, in turn, did lend credibility to the theaters as serious places to work.

The Turning Point

For the next three years, the Foundation also provided support to individual theatrical artists (see page 15). In 1962, furthermore, it made its first commitment to general operating support of theaters, granting \$6.1 million to nine companies.* The objective was to help the struggling theaters turn the corner in their quest for acceptance in their own communities and in the theater world in general. Between 1962 and 1976 support was provided to seventeen theaters** with grants totaling \$19.5 million in a nationwide effort to assist in the development of nonprofit theaters.

For example, the Actors Studio used its grant to launch a new producing company to perform American classics and new plays. Half the Alley Theatre's funds provided matching support for construction of a new building. The American Shakespeare Festival Theatre set up a training program to increase the number of American actors familiar with classical roles. The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis received a grant for the creation of an escrow fund for use should box office capacity fall below 75 per cent in any of its first three seasons.

A few illustrations may indicate how resident theaters bear the distinctive mark of their founders:

Zelda Fichandler, founder of the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and cited by a critic as the "national heroine of the regional movement," started her theater in 1950, as already noted, in a converted movie house. She later moved it to an abandoned

*Actors Studio, New York; Actor's Workshop, San Francisco; Alley Theatre, Houston; American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Stratford, Connecticut; Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.; Fred Miller Theatre (now the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre); Mummers Theatre, Oklahoma City; Theatre Group at the University of California, Los Angeles (now the Mark Taper Forum), and the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis.

**In addition to the nine theaters previously cited: Actors Theatre of Louisville; American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco; American Place Theatre, New York City; APA-Phoenix, New York City; Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park; New York Shakespeare Festival; Washington Theatre Club, District of Columbia, and the Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven.

brewery and, in 1961, opened a 773-seat house that was the first new theater built in Washington in sixty years. Arena Stage now has also a second theater, the 514-seat Kreeger Theater, and a basement area, called The Old Vat Room. The Arena complex is nestled on a peninsula jutting into the Potomac River a few blocks from the maze of federal buildings in the downtown section of the capital.

"We select our plays with a view to the insights they provide into contemporary questions," Ms. Fichandler says. "We are a theater of themes, with an emphasis on the variety of the statements, both as to content and to style."

Among the plays that have had their national or world premiers at the Arena Stage are *The Great White Hope*, *Indians*, and the musical, *Raisin*. Also produced have been works by Shakespeare, Molière, Anouilh, O'Neill and Williams. Such a repertoire has provided valuable early experience for scores of now-established actors, including George Grizzard, Jane Alexander, René Auberjonois, and Anthony "Erbe.

"I didn't know I was going to be part of a movement," says Nina Vance as she recalls the struggle to lure customers to a volunteer theatrical effort in a dance studio in Houston. Fronting on an alley, and adopting the name Alley Theatre, it opened in 1947 and turned professional in 1954. In 1968 it moved into a new theater, designed by the architect Ulrich Franzen, an imposing concrete building adjacent to the cultural complex in which the Houston's opera, symphony, and ballet perform.

The Alley now sells some 20,000 season tickets for performances in its main 800-seat theater and smaller 300-seat house. Audiences are treated to what Miss Vance describes as a continuing effort "to preserve the literature of the theater."

Among the nine plays the Alley's audience saw during the 1975-76 season were Arthur Kopit's *Indians*, *The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia* by Preston Jones, Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, T.S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party* and Edward Albee's *Tiny Alice*.

Miss Vance continues to be motivated by a belief that theater will endure: "If we're talking about something as ancient as the time when primitive men sat around a campfire and the hunters came in from the kill and began to tell a story, then I can only believe that that is eternal, and that the next generation will find a new way to tell the story. The need to tell the story is an absolute part of man's self."

William Ball has taken a slightly different route, literally and conceptually, in forming the American Conservatory Theatre (ACT). Ball is a Carnegie-Mellon graduate who had a solid reputation as a director in opera and the commercial theater when he

formed the company in 1965. He combined true repertory—a rotating performance schedule—with a daily training program for members of the company far more rigorous and comprehensive than most other theaters have attempted. He wanted ACT to be a theater in which all the artists would have a voice in determining policies and goals. He sought “an artistically creative, fertile ground, free from the pressures of intense financial operations. . . . I would like, somehow, dignity and joy to be possible for the actor in his work.”

Ball's company opened in Pittsburgh in 1965 with Molière's *Tartuffe*, but stayed there only a year. The company was without a home for another year until San Francisco offered a permanent base of operations, and ACT has been there ever since. In its second season there, it presented twenty-seven new productions in a forty-week season. It now is the country's largest and most active repertory company, with some 200 actors, directors, designers, craftsmen, technicians, and administrators as members, and an annual budget of \$4 million.

Audiences and the Earnings Gap

But for all the successes, resident theaters are unable to sustain themselves by means of box-office receipts. They are faced with annual overhead costs for full-time staffs, including maintenance, box office, and public-relations personnel. Moreover, because their plays are scheduled for short runs, they cannot earn back production costs. The theaters reject the option of markedly increasing the price of tickets to meet costs. To pay their way through the box office, many would have to charge prices that would tend to keep out persons of modest means. In order to continue to serve the community at large, they ask those who can afford to do so to pay more through contributions. In addition, theaters seek government grants to pay part of their general costs.

Accordingly the Foundation sought to strengthen resident theaters' efforts to raise contributed funds within their communities or through funds from other sources, such as state and federal agencies. To achieve this, most grants were made on a matching basis.

Theaters were also assisted in increasing their earnings through the sale of season subscriptions. The know-how was provided by Danny Newman, a consultant for the Foundation and the Theatre Communications Group. Described by *The New York Times* as “the Billy Graham of subscription theater,” Newman currently assists almost 100 performing arts groups, including opera, dance, and symphony as well as theater. He began his career at the age of fourteen, selling subscriptions for a civic theater, the

Mummers of Chicago, ringing doorbells house to house, apartment to apartment.

Newman instructs theater personnel in a full range of audience-development techniques, including telephone campaigns, direct-mail advertising, and block sales to businesses. His objective is to help a theater build an audience that subscribes for an entire season, thus reducing the uncertainty of single-ticket sales the night of a performance. When he began assisting the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, for example, it had 1,900 season subscribers; now it has 20,600. Several theaters he has helped now sell nearly 100 per cent of their seats through subscriptions.

In his book *Subscribe Now*, Newman advances the following economic moral: "If you don't sell a ticket on subscription, you probably won't sell it at all—the only time when tickets to concerts, opera, dance, and theater performances are *all* saleable is before the season begins."

Another effort to build an audience for theater arose, ironically, from the need of the New York theater to attract new patrons. The Theatre Development Fund (TDF), a nonprofit agency established with grants from the Twentieth Century Fund, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the National Endowment for the Arts, had been working on other approaches to audience development for several years. The Foundation supported a study of two of TDF's programs. One is a subsidy in the form of vouchers for off off Broadway plays; vouchers may be bought by persons on the TDF mailing list in books of five for \$5. Each voucher is used as payment toward admission to participating nonprofit theaters; the vouchers then are redeemed by TDF for \$2.50 each. The other program involves a ticket booth in New York's Duffy Square, just off the mid-town theater district, that sells unsold tickets at half-price on the day of performance for participating theaters, both commercial and noncommercial, as well as for concert halls. The study showed that the half-price ticket booth was a success and recommended opening another booth in lower Manhattan; this now operates near City Hall.

TDF has attracted the attention of groups in other cities, and the Foundation subsequently granted \$100,000 to enable it to assist nonprofit performing arts organizations around the country in augmenting their audiences.

Although many resident theaters have improved their financial condition through increased subscriptions, local fund drives, and tighter business practices, the majority still face operating problems because of the seasonal nature of their programs. Most performing arts companies have a cash-flow problem, having to meet pre-production and promotional expenses each season before box-office receipts and revenues from other sources are received. Many are also spending significant sums for annual debt

service. In order to deal with these problems, the Foundation in 1971 developed a "cash reserve" program to stabilize and improve the financial position of theater, opera, and dance companies.*

The cash reserve program has four goals:

- to eliminate cash-flow crises by providing a working capital reserve;
- to reduce costly debt-service payments;
- to provide companies with an incentive to complete each fiscal year in a net current asset position, and
- to underscore the need for sound management practices and effective multi-year planning.

Grants under this program have two features: First, money is provided for the liquidation of 50 per cent of a company's net current liabilities after the company has itself liquidated the other half within a prescribed period of time. Thereafter, the company must complete each fiscal year throughout the period of grant in a net current asset position. Second, money is given in installments for a restricted revolving cash fund from which withdrawals may be made to meet operating expenses until box office, subscription, and contributed funds come in. Before the close of each fiscal year of the grant, a company must restore all withdrawals from the revolving fund in order to receive the next installment. If this is done over the entire period of grant, generally five years, the company may keep the revolving fund as an unrestricted working capital reserve.

Throughout the grant period, the Foundation provides technical assistance in such matters as accounting procedures, controls, and internal financial reporting.

Theater managers report that cash reserve grants have helped them operate more efficiently and with fewer fiscal anxieties. As one manager commented, "I never even knew what working capital meant before."

The ability to meet its obligations promptly of course gives any organization standing in the community. "The reserve fund," says Charles N. Schenck III, chairman of the board of the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Conn., not only is assuring to

*Cash reserve grants in the theater to date have been made to twenty-two companies: The Actors Theatre of Louisville, American Conservatory Theatre, American Place Theatre (New York City), American Shakespeare Festival, Arena Stage, Asolo State Theatre (Sarasota, Fla.), Center Stage (Baltimore), Cincinnati Playhouse, Circle in the Square (New York City), Cleveland Play House, The Acting Company (New York City), Guthrie Theatre, Hartford Stage Company, Indiana Repertory Theatre (Indianapolis), Long Wharf Theatre (New Haven, Conn.), Loretto-Hilton Theatre (St. Louis), Mark Taper Forum (Los Angeles), New Federal Theatre (New York City), Seattle Repertory Theatre, Stage West (Springfield, Mass.), Studio Arena Theatre (Buffalo), Trinity Square Repertory (Providence, R.I.).

some of our more knowledgeable donors, but may also have influenced small foundations and other granting organizations which have assisted us from time to time, as well as our bank."

"The program effected a philosophical change in theater financial affairs," says Donald Schoenbaum, managing director and vice president for operations of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. Board and staff began to realize that long-term solutions could be found to financial problems. A sense of optimism as to budgeting and financing emerged."



Herb Kerr and Phillica Ayons Allen
at the New Federal Theater in *Don't
Let It Go to Your Head*.

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

Theater depends on the collaboration of diverse talents, including those of actors, writers, directors, and designers. The Foundation's first grant in the theatrical field, in 1957, enabled the Cleveland Play House to conduct a training program for a group of young actors prior to their undertaking a tour in the Midwest and Southwest. Shortly thereafter, as noted (page 8), funds were given to enable four theaters to hire actors for a full season, helping the performers perfect their craft as well as helping the theaters strengthen their productions. Since then programs designed to assist other professionals working in the theater have been supported.

Travel and study grants have been given to many professionals to enable them to catch up with current activities in the theater not only in this country but also abroad, where the concept of theater as a cultural and social force in a community has been long established. These grants, and the programs described below, were also designed to broaden theatrical artists' vision of what was possible in carrying the theater beyond the conventional limits of the entertainment industry.

Directors

In 1959 and 1960 the Foundation made grants to enable seventeen directors to pursue activities they felt would best advance their professional development. For most, the primary concern had been their isolation. Many had never met or corresponded with each other, and few had visited other theaters in this country, let alone the European models they admired. Nina Vance, Zelda Fichandler, Herbert Blau, and William Ball were among the seventeen as was Stuart Vaughan, then the artistic director at the Phoenix Theater, who saw 120 plays performed during an eight-month tour of Europe. He later noted that the experience, "with the chance to observe and rethink which it gave me, has changed my entire goal and process of work in theatre. [Otherwise] these insights might have taken many years, or might never have come at all."

Alan Schneider, a noted director and now head of the drama division of the Juilliard School in New York City, chose to stage plays at several resident theaters for a full year, including the Alley and the Actor's Workshop. The theaters otherwise would not have been able to have engaged him. "The theaters could afford to pay me very little, if anything," he said. "This way they paid whatever they could and the grant supplemented it."

Alvin Epstein, the associate director of the Yale Repertory Theatre who is due to become artistic director of the Guthrie Theatre in 1978, chose to work in New York City with a small, highly professional group of actor-mimes, investigating the melding of mime with the Stanislavski method of acting.

Playwrights

To stimulate the production of new plays, the Foundation in 1959 and 1960 underwrote the costs of ten plays performed at theaters around the country, among them Josh Greenfeld's *Clandestine on the Morning Line*. The Foundation offered theaters funds to cover production costs for plays selected by a panel of theater professionals convened by the Foundation.

At about the same time, fellowships were given to enable twenty-six poets and novelists to spend up to a year in residence with a theater or opera company. The program was designed to test whether these writers, after close observation of the needs and demands of the stage, could be stimulated to try their hand at writing in the dramatic form. Introducing new energies into the theater, it was hoped, would raise the intellectual quality of plays and librettos being written.

Among those awarded fellowships, were James Purdy, Anne Sexton, Shelby Foote, Mark Harris, Herbert Gold, and John Hawkes. None of the writers was required to

produce a particular piece of work. A few did write plays over the next few years, most notably Robert Lowell, whose trilogy of plays called *The Old Glory* was hailed as a major work when it was produced at the American Place Theatre. Many considered the experience of working with theater companies helpful, but for the most part the experiment did not produce the results the Foundation had hoped for: new plays by established writers who had not previously been involved in the theater.

Beginning in 1964, the Foundation initiated a program to facilitate close working relations between directors of resident theaters and the authors of new plays that the directors were interested in producing. It underwrote such minor costs as travel and living expenses to enable the playwrights to participate in rehearsals, costs that few theaters could include in their regular budgets. In this way, the playwrights became a more integral part of the production process..

The first of some three dozen collaborations assisted under the program was Millard Lampell's *Hard Travelin'*, which opened in December, 1964 at Arena Stage. *Raisin*, which also opened at Arena (May, 1973), and moved on to Broadway, where it won the Tony Award as best musical of 1974. Many of the plays assisted under this collaborative arrangement have become standard works in the repertoire of resident theaters. Arthur Kopit's *Indians*, for example, which moved from the Arena to Broadway, opened Alley Theatre's 1975-76 season and has been made into a motion picture. Others assisted include Michael Weller's *Moonchildren*, Stanley Greenberg's *Pueblo* (later produced as a television special), and Paul Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man in the Moon Marigolds*, which was first presented at the Alley Theatre and went on to win off Broadway's Obie award and a Pulitzer Prize.

It is often difficult for a playwright to sense the transformation of his own work from words on paper to action in a theater. Traditionally the only way an author could see how the manuscript played on the stage was by watching rehearsals for a full-scale production. Now, however, many theaters offer workshop productions, in which a play is rendered in any one of several forms, from a simple reading to a full run-through.

For seven years, beginning in 1964, a grant to New York's American Place Theatre helped playwrights working at all levels of experience and in a wide variety of styles see their plays performed professionally, whether in a reading or a full production. Robert Lowell's *The Old Glory*, Paul Goodman's *Jonah*, Ronald Ribman's *Journey of the Fifth Horse*, and William Alfred's *Hogan's Goat* were all produced first at the American Place. This writer-development program also provided opportunities for actors, directors, and designers to work with a broader range of productions than might have been possible on the commercial stage.

Designers

One of the persistent themes in early Foundation discussions with theater professionals was the physical inadequacy of theaters for the kinds of plays people wanted to write and stage. Arthur Miller, in particular, felt constrained by existing theaters. "I think a new form is going to burst out," he said, "because the world is now impossible to reflect in such a cubic fashion. . . . What we are trying to do now is make a theater of essences."

From such discussions came a program in which eight teams of theater designers and architects* developed their concepts of what the ideal theater should be like. The purpose was to stimulate architects, designers, and theater people generally to work together to analyze the stage and its environment. Many of the ideas thus developed, and presented in a traveling exhibition and catalogue, have been incorporated in some of the newer theaters in the United States.

Before the mid-1960s, theaters in New York City could not share a parcel of land with other institutions—offices or schools, say. Because of the high price of Manhattan real estate, this restriction on the use of land contributed to the growing costs of operating a theater building. In the first quarter of the twentieth century some eighty theaters were built in midtown New York, but by the mid-1970s more than two-thirds of them had been razed or converted to other uses. In order to sustain the mid-Manhattan theatrical district, the city amended its zoning ordinances to enable new theaters to be included in high-rise office buildings planned for the area.

Asked to help the city and developers plan theaters for some of the new buildings, the Foundation made a \$60,000, three-year grant in 1967 for a Theater Projects Committee that helped evaluate and shape proposed designs. Members of the committee included theater architects, set designers, producers, and directors. Their ideas were incorporated in the construction of several new theaters, notably the new homes for the American Place Theatre and Circle in the Square.

Administrators

In an effort to promote career possibilities on the administrative side of theaters and also to provide on-the-job training in their business operations, the Foundation from 1962 to 1970 made internship awards to forty-three men and women.**

*Ralph Alswang and Paul Rudolph; Eldon Elder and Edward Durrell Stone; Barrie Greenbie and Elizabeth Harris; David Hays and Peter Blake; George C. Izenour and Paul Schweikher; Frederick J. Kiesler; Jo Mielziner and Edward L. Barnes; Ben Schlanger and Donald Oenslager.

**List available on request.

A delicate balance had to be reached in the nationwide search for participants who were both artistically knowledgeable and business-oriented.

Most of the recipients served one-year internships, although a few received awards for as many as three years. In order to familiarize themselves with overall theater operations, they worked in every department. Former interns in the program now are prominent in the management of several major resident theaters. Donald H. Schoenbaum, for example, is the managing director and vice president for operations of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. Peter Donnelly is the producing director of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, C. William Stewart is managing director of the Hartford Stage Company, and William P. Wingate is general manager of the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles.

Critics

Informed critics who understand what a theater is trying to do—in its entirety as well as through individual productions—help shape an audience's perceptions of a company. The Foundation gave fellowships in 1964 to enable seven reporters, editors, and critics* to travel in this country and abroad to increase their understanding of the changing world of the theater. Robert Brustein, for example, then drama critic for *The Nation* and now dean of the Yale Drama School and director of the Yale Repertory Theatre, observed improvisational theater here and in Europe. T.E. Kalem of *Time* magazine and Jerry Tallmer of the *New York Post* examined contemporary theater in England and Europe. Julius Novick, a writer and teacher, surveyed American resident professional theaters and recorded his impressions in a book entitled *Beyond Broadway*.

International Exchanges

Some seventy-five individuals in the United States and abroad have received Foundation grants to increase their awareness of developments in the theater through travel and observation.**

The exchanges were also intended to widen the experience of American theater artists. Thus Arvin Brown, artistic director of the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, directed the premiere in England of Israel Horovitz's play *The Indian*

*In addition to the four critics cited above: Ann H. Holmes, fine-arts editor, *Houston Chronicle*; Gordon Rogoff, free-lance drama critic and then contributing editor of the *Tulane Drama Review*; Maxine Cushing Gray, arts and education editor, *The Argus*, Seattle, Washington.

**List available on request.

Want the Bronx. "The value of the venture was threefold," he said. "First, a challenging American playwright was introduced to English audiences. Second, cast, crew, and director grew artistically, the inevitable and happy result of a successful cultural exchange. Third . . . I gained from the British experience of integrating a repertory theatre into the everyday life of a community."

In discussing his experience in England, Brown explored some of the basic problems affecting the development of permanent companies in America. "Nearly everyone in the American theatre," he said, "is sooner or later imprisoned by the success ethic of American society. . . . If an artist remains at Long Wharf Theatre for any period of time, he expects, quite naturally, a steady increase in salary and evidence of a growing national reputation. The English actor at Watford recognizes that his work precludes both higher salary and national fame." Because the English have a theatrical tradition stretching back hundreds of years, Brown suggested, "the effects of that tradition on the audience and the performers insure an admirable loyalty, and guarantee an artistic caliber which cannot be bought."

Foreign artists coming to this country under the exchanges have demonstrated their approaches and learned from American efforts. Jerzy Grotowski, for example, who developed an ensemble in Poland that lives and works together as it tries to devise new theatrical methods, came here to demonstrate to American theater artists his views on directing and training actors.

New American Plays

A three-year program of assistance for the production of new American plays in experimental, resident, and other professional theater companies was initiated by the Foundation in 1976. Grants to as many as a hundred companies may be made in the first year, for which \$600,000 has been committed.

Funds will be granted for plays chosen by the theaters themselves. They must be previously unproduced or have had no more than one professional production. The funds granted are to be used for such costs as commissioning or optioning a play, travel, and other expenses for the playwright, promotion and production, and fees for a nonresident director, designer, composer, or other artistic collaborator.

The funds awarded to each theater will be relatively small, in no case more than \$7,500 in the first year.

EXPERIMENTAL THEATERS

Even as old dramatic concepts are challenged and new ones tested, there is always a debt to the past, to earlier experiments in other places. "Theater is always reaching back to its innocent sources," wrote Stuart Little, a critic, in discussing the latest center of theatrical ferment in his book *Off-Broadway*. "Off-off-Broadway sought the purity of the simple theatrical partnership of author, director, and actor working with their heads together on the script. Off-off-Broadway was like Circle in the Square in the days of its innocence. . . . Off-off-Broadway was in the tradition of George Cram Cook's Provincetown Players in its ambition to remain small, avoid commercial temptations and pressures, resist professionalism, and do the work."

The movement known as Off-Off Broadway developed in the mid-1960s in scattered coffeehouses, churches, basements, lofts, old storefronts and other odd locations scattered throughout New York's Greenwich Village and East Village. In many ways it echoed the beliefs of people active in the resident theater movement, such as director Michael Langham, who said in the early 1960s that a theater must "keep sticking its neck out and doing what it believes. It must never attempt to woo popularity. . . . We must have the guts to create fashion rather than to follow it."

Most of these new theaters came into existence to serve the playwright. Their productions provided an opportunity for writers, unknown or successful, to try out new works. Since 1968 the Foundation has assisted six of these theaters: La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, Chelsea Theater Center, The Open Theater, New Theatre Workshop, Theatre Genesis, and the Performance Group.

These were all in New York City. Within a few years, though, the Off-Off Broadway concept had spread throughout the country. Today professionally-oriented theaters and workshops are outlets for new works by American playwrights or unscripted plays developed by groups of actors and directors.

Three of the Genre

Of the many experimental theaters that burst onto the scene in the 1960s, none has endured as long or been as influential as the La Mama Experimental Theatre Club.

La Mama now occupies a spacious, renovated complex in the East Village, a far cry from the basement cubbyhole that served as a boutique by day and theater by night when La Mama first opened in July 1962 as Cafe La Mama. But it continues to tackle the offbeat and the difficult and provide a haven and freedom to work for many theatrical artists from this country and abroad.

Ellen Stewart, the vibrant, Arkansas-born founder of La Mama, started her theater as "a warm place for playwrights to blossom in." True to her inspiration, she produced works by Megan Terry, Rochelle Owen, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Sam Shepard, and Lanford Wilson, among others. ("The great thing about La Mama," says van Itallie, "is that you can fail there.")

La Mama has staged more than 625 plays by some 370 playwrights. The productions have involved almost 300 directors, one of the first of whom was Tom O'Horgan, known mainly for *Hair*. Much of La Mama's work has been assisted by the Foundation, with grants for general support and for renovation of facilities.

Over the years La Mama has developed a number of companies that work both in New York City and on the road. In addition, Miss Stewart has helped blacks, American Indians, and Chinese Americans start theater groups. La Mama has also been the inspiration for the creation of theater companies in a number of other countries, among them, Colombia, Australia, Japan, Germany, Canada, France, Israel, and Morocco.

"My vision," says Miss Stewart, "is that we are one world, and that everybody is, in fact, the other person. My way of trying to help this to be a reality is through theater. There was a time when every part of living was approached through ritual, whether it was a birthing, a dying, a planting, a reaping, a marriage. Everything was

through ritual and ceremony, which for me is theater."

The full power of theater, says Miss Stewart, is evident "when an audience, for that short time, breathes and lives the same moment. In those moments every person is one person."

Joseph Chaikin's Open Theater first produced van Itallie's *The Serpent*, which *The New York Times* described as an "awesome effort." The Open Theater emphasized improvisation by the actor, with the director putting all the pieces together—a concept linking it with the experiments of Jerzy Grotowski in Poland and André Bourseiller in France.

Richard Schechner, former editor of *The Drama Review*, established the Performance Group to give concrete form to his belief that "theater is an unliterary art, a here-and-now experience. Its finest expressions are immediate, gestural, involved, inclusive, and participatory . . . You see, the problem is to make a theater, not cast a play." Much of the Performance Group's experimentation has consisted in arranging the stage differently for each play, and generally extending it to include the audience as part of the performance.

Enter Peter Brook

The British director Peter Brook, who staged the highly popular and experimental *Marat/Sade* in London and on Broadway, began perhaps the most provocative experimental group when he established the International Centre of Theatrical Research in 1971. Brook gathered in Paris an international company of actors, directors, and writers, including several actors from La Mama. The group has performed over the last four years, and worked with other theater companies, in Iran, along the River Niger in West Africa, and in the United States. Brook's experiments, which have been supported by many sources, including the Iranian Government, the Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, have the ultimate aim of stripping theater of its separate national craft and language identities, and the methods he has used often have gone far beyond most other experiments to date. The performers undergo extensive training in movement, gesture, and voice, and one production, Ted Hughes' *Orghast*, based on the ancient fire myths of Prometheus and Zoroaster, used a new "language" consisting of sounds rather than words in an effort to achieve the common, universal communication that Brook strives for. "An actor can mouth the noblest words and they may fall flat," says Brook, "but he may, with a simple 'aah,' suddenly touch something in the audience."

The British director Peter Hall has described Brook as being "committed not to a

diagnosis, but to a cure." The extent of Brook's attempted cure is indicated by his statement, "In the theatre, the slate is wiped clean all the time." For Brook, "truth in the theatre is always on the move. . . . Today, it is hard to see how a vital theatre and a necessary one can be other than out of tune with society—not seeking to celebrate the accepted values, but to challenge them. . . . The destruction of old forms, the experimenting with new ones: new words, new relationships, new places, new buildings: they all belong to the same process. . . . the theatre of joy, of catharsis, of celebration, the theatre of exploration, the theatre of shared meaning, the living theatre are one."

Not everyone agrees with—or understands—Brook, or accepts the statement in *The New York Times* that "Brook has altered the course of both English and American theater." But Brook's efforts to define theater in the context of the last half of the twentieth century are the subject of continual debate and exploration.

MINORITY THEATERS

In 1967 the Foundation helped launch the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), a New York City-based effort to create a permanent theater to help develop black actors, playwrights, directors, technicians, and managers.

The founders of NEC were Douglas Turner Ward, an actor, playwright, and director; the actor Robert Hooks, and Gerald S. Krone, a white associate. Ward has described the company as "a theatre concentrating primarily on themes of Negro life, but also resilient enough to incorporate and interpret the best of world drama—whatever the source. . . . So might the Negro, a most potential agent of vitality, infuse life into the moribund corpus of American theatre."

NEC grew out of an Off Broadway production of two of Ward's plays, *Happy Ending* and *Day of Absence*. The first NEC production—*Song of the Lusitanian Bogey* by Peter Weiss, author of *Marat/Sade*—established the company as one of artistic merit. The company received a special Obie award in its first year, and several individual NEC members have received Obie and Drama Desk-Vernon Rice awards since then. Two of its plays, *The River Niger* and *First Breeze of Summer*, were moved to Broadway and have been performed throughout the country; *The River Niger* has been made into a motion picture.

The Foundation has also helped to support the Free Southern Theater founded by Stokely Carmichael, Gilbert Moses, and John O'Neal, which grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Established in 1962 as the cultural arm of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the troupe's black and white members toured the South, primarily in remote rural towns, to proclaim the message of black liberation through drama to Southern audiences that may never have seen a play. Its offerings included plays by blacks and whites. The theater toured through 1969, then settled in New Orleans. Early in 1975 it went on the road again, this time as an all-black operation. "It was most important that we develop our own artists, our own image," said Gilbert Moses.

Now directed by John O'Neal, the Free Southern Theater is credited by many with starting the revival of black culture that grew out of the black awareness movement of the 1960s. Since it began, several other drama companies have been organized to help blacks and other minorities understand their heritage and develop individual talent. A number of these groups have also received Foundation assistance. They include the following: The Native American Theater Ensemble was formed by Hanay Geiogamah, a Kiowa playwright who wanted an American Indian group to tour Indian communities on reservations and in urban areas. The ensemble was trained in basic theater techniques at La Mama, and then moved to Oklahoma.

The New Lafayette Theater and Workshop, founded in Harlem and directed by Robert Macbeth, featured the work of "black playwrights, notably that of Ed Bullins. Edith Oliver said in the *New Yorker* that Bullins has "an extraordinary ability to make an audience feel that it is catching the characters unaware in the act of living." Bullins is writing a series of plays he calls "Twentieth Century Cycle," an interrelated body of twenty plays of which some half-dozen or so have been completed, including *The Duplex* and *In the Wine Time*. The New Lafayette offered plays at low prices to encourage members of the community to attend. It also presented special programs for schools, and taught blacks the art and craft of the theater.

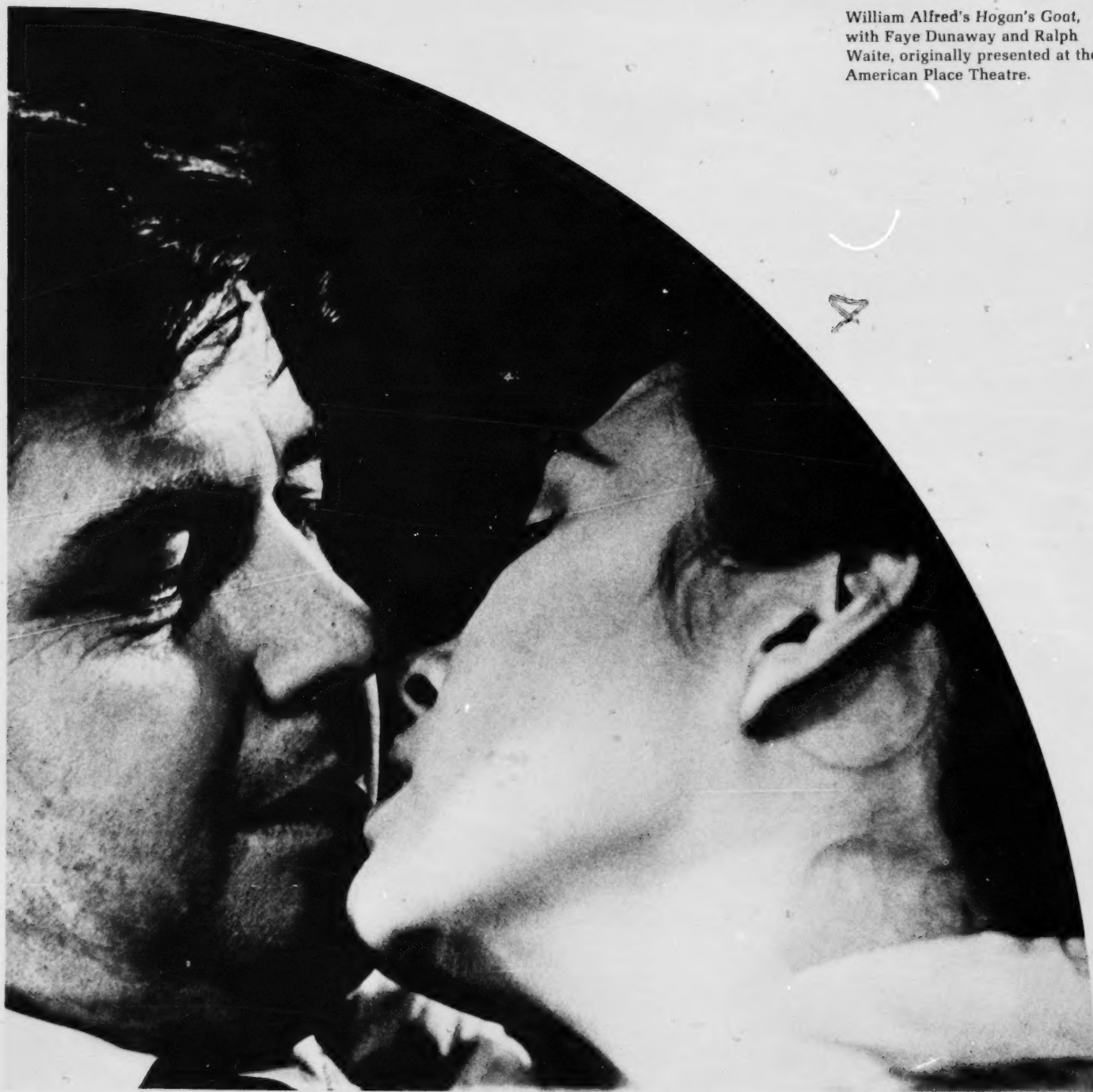
The Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles, headed by C. Bernard Jackson, began as one of three federally funded Educational Laboratory Theater projects, and for four years performed such plays as *Macbeth* and *El Manco*, by a Chicano playwright, for high school students. The center now offers degrees in theater, music, and dance, and a one-year vocational certificate in technical theater.

The Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts in Boston and The Performing Arts Workshop in San Francisco provide training and performing opportunities for young minority people in those cities.

Woodie King's New Federal Theatre, sponsored by the Henry Street Settlement in New York City, explores "new methods of using theatrical techniques as an integral part of the educational process." Serving primarily an ethnic constituency, the theater has produced such works as *Black Girl*, carrying on a tradition at the settlement house that began in 1915 with the creation of the Neighborhood Playhouse to serve the people of the area.

Advanced training for blacks enrolled in a three-year graduate training program at the Yale School of Drama has also been supported by the Foundation. Since the first funds were provided in 1968, some one hundred blacks have been trained in acting, playwriting, administration, and other aspects of the theater. Graduates have performed in resident theaters throughout the country and in such Broadway productions as *Raisin* and *The River Niger*.

William Alfred's *Hogan's Goot*,
with Faye Dunaway and Ralph
Waite, originally presented at the
American Place Theatre.



COMMUNICATION

For a long time, the new theaters worked with little knowledge of what was happening elsewhere. Someone in Boston could develop an approach totally unaware of similar work being done in Minneapolis or Dallas or San Francisco, let alone Paris or Warsaw.

Over the last thirty years several efforts have been made to break down this isolation, so that theater artists may share experiences and profit from cooperative programs. One such effort is the International Theatre Institute (ITI), founded in 1948 and chartered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. ITI promotes conferences, exchanges, and study tours. The Foundation has assisted the work of the United States affiliate of ITI in facilitating conferences and exchanges for American and foreign artists.

Within the U.S., however, the most extensive and effective effort to encourage cooperation among theaters and individuals active in the noncommercial theater movement—resident professional, Off Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, ethnic, and experimental—has been the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), which the Foundation established in 1961.

"I think theatre is beginning to come of age in America," wrote Peter Zeisler, TCG's director, in 1973, "largely because it is now, for the first time, addressing the needs of

varying but specific constituencies in our complex society. . . . The Broadway commercial theatre—formerly the single source for theatrical material and artists—has been replaced by a national network of producing organizations.” The phenomenon had been recognized earlier by *Variety*, which noted in 1967, “For the first time since the heyday of stock, there are more professional actors working in regional theaters than in Broadway and touring productions. . . . It appears that the numerical focus of legit has shifted from Broadway, with all the ramifications that fact may suggest.”

One of TCG’s most important functions is a casting service that provides some order to what normally is a chaotic situation. The system made familiar through Hollywood films, in which an aspiring actor, all nerves and nausea, competes on a bare stage with dozens of others just as hungry and anxious for a part, is still integral to the theatrical process. While this system may help determine who the best talents are for current Broadway productions, such tryouts do little to help theaters around the country locate competent and available actors—or to help the actors find competent and available theaters.

TCG provides a variety of casting services for more than forty theaters. It maintains a file of actors in its New York City office, arranges appointments, and runs an audition room at its headquarters.

Each year TCG also conducts a national audition for theater students eager to enter the profession. Drama schools nominate some 600 candidates for a series of preliminary auditions held across the country. TCG’s casting staff and some teachers serve as judges, selecting seventy-five for a final audition in Chicago before directors of theaters.

TCG keeps lines of communication open among theater people through conferences, a newsletter, detailed published descriptions of most performing companies, and a financial survey of all theaters with budgets over \$200,000, which serves as an annual economic report on the nonprofit theater. TCG’s publications also are an authoritative resource for the public, the media, and funding sources.

In addition, files are maintained on directors, designers, stage managers, technicians, and administrators.

One of TCG’s simplest and most effective means for keeping theater professionals abreast of developments is an observership program, in which artists and administrators are given funds to travel to other organizations to observe their work and operations and to exchange ideas. Zelda Fichandler, for example, has visited ACT and the Provisional Theatre in Los Angeles; Ed Bullins has visited black theaters in San Francisco and Los Angeles; Barry Pritchard came from Seattle to New York City

for rehearsals of his play, *Alive and Well in Argentina*, at St. Clement's Theatre; Gordon Davidson, artistic director at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, came east to observe the work of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

TCG's board of directors is a Who's Who of the theater world and has included Zelda Fichandler, Gordon Davidson, Arvin Brown, Nina Vance, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Geraldine Fitzgerald, and Harold Prince.



Peter Brook's production of
Orghast, performed by the
International Centre of Theatrical
Research at Persepolis, Iran, in
August 1971.

THE STAGE TOMORROW

A financial survey of all the performing arts, published by the Ford Foundation in 1974* showed in precise terms what most people in the theater had known for years: that noncommercial arts companies could not be expected to support themselves from box office receipts and other forms of earned income alone. The survey was undertaken because performing arts managers had long been handicapped by the lack of systematically compiled financial data, not only for their own groups but for comparable institutions in the field as a whole. Without such data, an accurate appraisal of their present economic situation, much less rational planning for the future, was impossible.

"The largest and least flexible cost," noted the report, "is the one for artistic personnel." This portion of a theater's budget grows as the salary level in the general economy increases. Industries can sometimes offset additional salary costs by increasing productivity through technological advances, but no comparable increase in

*The Finances of the Performing Arts: A Ford Foundation Report: Volume I, "A Survey of 166 Professional Nonprofit Resident Theaters, Operas, Symphonies, Ballets, and Modern Dance Companies," and Volume II, "A Survey of the Characteristics and Attitudes of Audiences for Theater, Opera, Symphony, and Ballet in Twelve U.S. Cities," are available at \$10.00 each (ten or more copies, \$9.00 each) from the Foundation, P.O. Box 1919, New York, N.Y. 10001.

productivity is possible for theaters, since the number of man-hours required to perform a play is fixed. Consequently, to cover increased salary costs theaters would have to raise ticket prices markedly. But as noted previously, there are limits to the extent to which they can do this. Earned income, therefore, cannot keep up with expenditures, and the ever-widening gap between the two must be filled by increasing amounts of contributed income. Fund raising thus is a constant consideration.

The report covered six seasons, from 1965-66 to 1970-71. For many reasons it was not possible to project exactly what future expenditures the organizations would incur and what contributions they would receive, but it was possible to ascertain trends and speculate on their implications. One obvious conclusion was that support from private patrons, national foundations, corporations, and federal, state and municipal programs would have to increase substantially simply to maintain the 1970-71 financial position of the performing organizations in the study.

Despite the difficult financial prospects thus noted, the report was heartening as to the artistic outlook. The resident theater movement, the report remarked, had decentralized the dramatic arts in the United States by breaking Broadway's hold, thus leading to the creation of more permanent professional theaters in the United States than had existed before.

For almost two decades the Foundation's program in the arts has emphasized two interrelated objectives: aid to professional artists at various stages of their careers and support for key performing groups. The support of theater from 1957 through 1976 has included not only operating support and capital grants but also the more recent cash reserve grants and has totaled approximately \$43 million.

Because of a general cutback in funds throughout the Foundation, however, beginning in 1975 for at least a three-year period, less money now is available to support all the activities in the arts, including theater. The current emphasis is on finding alternative ways of strengthening the financial position and management of arts organizations. The Foundation meanwhile will continue to encourage the development of talent and art forms, and efforts to make the arts more widely accessible.

ELECTRONIC THEATER

In the early 1950s, the adolescent medium of television caught the imagination of the drama world. Millions of viewers could watch televised plays. Anthology series such as the "Philco-Goodyear Playhouse," "Play of the Week," "Studio One," and "Playhouse 90" flourished. Television drama provided a training ground for hundreds of young actors, writers, and directors who went on to luminous careers in movies and in the theater. Years later, John Houseman, actor, producer, writer, and founder and artistic director of the Acting Company remarked: "Television drama, as produced by the major networks in the 'fifties', was the aristocrat of the air-waves."

The possibilities for "living-room theater" were acknowledged by the Foundation as early as 1951, when the Foundation began support of a five-year experiment—the TV-Radio Workshop—to test whether educational and cultural programs could attract both audience and sponsorship on commercial television. The Workshop's best known and most ambitious effort was "Omnibus," a series devoting approximately one-third of its programs to classical and contemporary literature and drama.

With Robert Saudek as producer and Alistair Cooke as master of ceremonies, "Omnibus" premiered on the CBS network in 1952.* Protected by the Foundation's subsidy (covering production costs above income from sponsors, the supplement amounted to slightly more than \$3 million for the five years the program ran), "Omnibus" continued through the 1956-57 season.

The ninety-minute length and flexible format of "Omnibus" were major innovations at the time, and lent themselves to a variety of dramas. Presentations ranged from plays by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Shaw, O'Neill, and Thornton Wilder to *A Different Drummer*, an experimental work by a Baylor University theater group.

"Omnibus" won awards by the dozen, but by the time it began its last network season, the brilliant age of television theater was waning. Erik Barnouw, a historian of broadcasting, attributes this to pressures from advertisers and sponsors who felt uneasy about frequently somber settings and political implications in some of the plays, and to a drive for programs with greater merchandising appeal. Plays still appeared now and then as "specials," but the experimentation and variety possible with the regularly scheduled series temporarily evaporated. The hope that "Omnibus" would find permanent sponsors and network support was unfulfilled. It seemed clear that an audience existed for this kind of programming, but what was needed was a vehicle sheltered from the imperatives of the marketplace.

The Educational Connection

In 1952, when the Federal Communications Commission allocated 242 channels for educational television, the Foundation helped communities to get the new stations going and established a national center for quality programming and production—National Educational Television (NET).** Between 1951 and 1967, when Congress passed the Public Broadcasting Act, the Foundation granted some \$142 million for educational television.

Over the next decade a number of efforts were assisted to help public television realize its promise as an alternative to commercial broadcasting by offering programs of merit that did not need the audience ratings necessary for survival on commercial networks.

*For its fifth and final season, "Omnibus" was transferred to the ABC network.

**NET began as the Educational Television and Radio Center located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1959 the center moved to New York, and in 1970 it merged with noncommercial station WNDT (Channel 13) to become WNET.

For a two-year experiment, known as the Public Broadcast Laboratory (PBL), the Foundation appropriated \$12 million. With a mix of public-affairs and cultural programming, in 1967 PBL opened television to theater from new sources: the ghetto, the subculture, the so-called underground. Its first program featured Douglas Turner Ward's *Day of Absence*, a play about race with black performers in "whiteface." Shocking many viewers and refused by some stations, the play was only the curtain raiser on a series that was to win its share of plaudits and brickbats. Despite mixed reviews, PBL had opened the door to new, fresh talent.

By 1968 television drama had found a hospitable home in public television. "NET Playhouse" offered such works as James Weldon Johnson's *Trumpets of the Lord*, Archibald MacLeish's *An Evening's Journey to Conway, Massachusetts*, Arthur Miller's *A Memory of Two Mondays*, and an Open Theatre production of *The Serpent*. In 1968-69 WGBH in Boston produced a series of one-hour dramas by blacks and WNDT in New York offered a series of original dramas by young writers.

Another major series, "Hollywood Television Theatre," made its debut in 1970. Based at KCET in Los Angeles and headed by Lewis Freedman, whose experience included "Camera Three" and "Play of the Week," the series enlisted the enthusiasm of first-rate Hollywood directors, actors, and writers despite public broadcasting's limited budgets. Its initial offering, Saul Levitt's *The Andersonville Trial*, with George C. Scott in his television directing debut, won both Peabody and Emmy Awards. Among its other productions were *The Typists*, with Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson; *Birdbath*, written by a young playwright from the La Mama Experimental Theatre Club; an anthology of the works of Samuel Beckett; and *Montserrat*, with Geraldine Page.

Resident professional theaters in the United States found a national forum in 1973 when WNET introduced the series "Theater in America," with funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Exxon Corporation. The series has provided national audiences for such productions as *Feasting with Panthers*, from Providence's Trinity Square Repertory Company; *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, from New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre; *The School for Scandal*, from the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis; *The First Breeze of Summer*, from New York's Negro Ensemble Company; and the Hartford Stage Company's production of Edward Albee's *All Over*.

Joining Forces

Despite much acclaim, these series have been sharing the public television stage with numerous imports from England, notably "Masterpiece Theatre." As disturbing as the

dearth of similar home-grown series has been the absence of a substantial body of original American drama written expressly for television.

To encourage the revitalization of original American television drama, the Foundation joined forces in 1974 with the National Endowment for the Arts, the Theatre Communications Group, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Public Broadcasting Service to create the "Visions" project. A new production unit was created under the following conditions: freedom from censorship, sufficient lead time for production, autonomy for the artistic director, adequate funds for promotion and advertising, and the freedom to fail.

Based at KCET in Los Angeles, "Visions" is directed by Barbara Schultz, a former executive producer for "CBS Playhouse" and executive producer of "CBS Children's Hour." The cost for two broadcasting seasons, with a total of twenty-four programs, is estimated at \$6.2 million.

More than 3,000 writers submitted original ideas or material (new work, not adaptations) for consideration by "Visions"—not only established playwrights but also novelists, poets, historians, journalists, and others. By late 1976, "Visions" had commissioned fifty-five writers (three plays were developed for every one produced) and had completed twenty-four plays. They included *Liza's Plains Diary* by Nell Cox, *The War Widow* by Harvey Perr, *The Great Cherub Knitwear Strike* by Ethel Tyne, *Gold Watch* by Momoko Iko, and *El Corrido* by Louis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino. "Visions" opened as a weekly series on October 21, 1976, with *Two Brothers* by Conrad Bromberg.

Hopes are high that "Visions" can bring new energy and emotion to American television drama.

FORD FOUNDATION ASSISTANCE TO AMERICAN THEATER

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THEATER COMPANIES

Actors Studio (New York)

General support (1962)	\$ 250,000
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Actors Theatre of Louisville

Acquisition and renovation of facilities (1971)	360,000
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Cash reserve grant (1976)	255,191
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Actor's Workshop (San Francisco Actor's Workshop Guild)

General support (1960, 1962)	283,000
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Alley Theatre (Houston)

General support and capital plant (1960, 1962, 1966)	3,656,000
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American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco)

General support (1967-1969, 1971)	2,395,000
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Cash reserve grant (1974)	450,000
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Operating support and capital plant (1974)	1,550,000
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American Place Theatre (New York)

Program for American playwrights (1964, 1967, 1971)	809,000
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Cash reserve grant (1971)	255,474
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American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy of Connecticut

General support (1962, 1964)	657,493
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Cash reserve grant (1975)	974,927
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APA Phoenix (Theatre Incorporated, New York)

General support (1960, 1967)	\$ 640,000
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Arena Stage (Washington Drama Society)

General support and capital plant (1960, 1962, 1966, 1970)	2,089,546
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Production intern program (1966, 1968)	146,450
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Artistic development of black artists in resident professional theater (1968)	250,000
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Cash reserve grant (1973)	642,542
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Operating support recoverable grant (1973)	100,000
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Asolo State Theater (Sarasota, Florida)

Cash reserve grant (1972)	176,955
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Center Stage Associates (Baltimore)

Cash reserve grant (1971)	320,545
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Loan for new facilities (1975)	750,000
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Center Theatre Group of Los Angeles (Mark Taper Forum)

General support (1967)	500,000
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Cash reserve grant (1973)	865,015
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Chelsea Theater Center (New York)

Playwrights' production workshop (1968, 1972)	511,084
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Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park

General support (1969)	350,000
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Cash reserve grant (1973)	420,751
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Circle in the Square (New York)* (1975)

	1,000,000
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Group I Acting Company (New York)* (1975)	350,834
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Guthrie Theatre Foundation (Minneapolis)

General support (1962, 1967)	1,206,838
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Cash reserve grant (1972)	618,828
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Hartford Stage Company* (1971)

	239,650
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Indiana Repertory Theatre* (1976)	162,409
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La Mama Experimental Theatre Club (New York)

Playwrights' production workshop (1967, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975)	1,165,987
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Operating expenses of the Native American Theater Ensemble (1974)	25,000
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Long Wharf Theatre (Connecticut Players Foundation)* (1972)

	265,561
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Loretto-Hilton Theatre (St. Louis)* (1974)	222,010
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Milwaukee Repertory Theatre (Drama, Inc.)

General support (1962)	50,000
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Mummers Theatre (Oklahoma City)

Capital support (1962, 1966)	1,785,000
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*Cash reserve grant

National Endowment for the Arts	
Strengthening the Washington Drama Society (Arena Stage) (1970)	\$ 300,000
Negro Ensemble Company (New York)	
General support (1967, 1968, 1970-1972)	2,257,498
New Federal Theater (New York)* (1976)	89,141
New Lafayette Theatre and Workshop (New York)	
Community theater and workshop demonstration in Harlem (1967-1969, 1971-1972)	1,520,664
New Theatre Workshop (New York)	
Playwrights' production workshop (1968, 1970)	147,592
New York Shakespeare Festival (New York)	
General support (1973)	1,500,000
Loan for rehabilitation of the Delacorte Theater (1976)	260,000
The Open Theatre (New York)	
Playwrights' production workshop (1968, 1970)	102,250
Performing Arts Workshop (San Francisco)	
Drama and dance activities (1969)	62,500
The Play House (Cleveland)	
To develop talented actors; extension of professional theater to small mid-western towns (1957, 1959)	160,500
Cash reserve grant (1972)	225,706
Seattle Repertory Theatre* (1971)	305,240
Southeastern Academy of Theatre and Music (Academy Theatre) (Atlanta)	
Training service-oriented artist-teachers (1973)	375,000
Stage/West (Springfield Theatre Arts Association) (Massachusetts)* (1972)	149,974
Studio Theatre School (Studio Arena Theatre) (New York)* (1976)	418,643
Theater Genesis (New York)	
Playwrights' production workshop (1968, 1970)	112,540
Trinity Square Repertory Company (Foundation for Repertory Theater of Rhode Island)* (1971)	357,606
Washington Theater Club (District of Columbia)	
General support (1969)	250,000
Wooster Group (New York)	
Experimental theater of the Performance Group (1971, 1973)	40,000
Working Theatre (New York)	
Demonstration of methods for training teachers for the theater (1976)	240,000
Yale University Repertory Theatre/School of Drama* (1976)	506,586

*Cash reserve grant

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

American National Theatre and Academy

Congresses of the International Theatre Institute (1966, 1968) \$ 95,141

Arts and Business Council of New York City

Management counseling for small performing arts groups† (1976) 15,000

Arts of the Theatre Foundation

Development of a portable theater structure (1964) 56,030

For a book by Jo Mielziner entitled "The Scope of the Theatre" (1967) 9,200

Council on Foundations

Cultural Advisory Service on the arts for local and regional foundations† (1975) 37,500

International Center of Theatrical Research (Paris)

Workshop to train actors and directors (1970, 1972, 1974) 668,777

International Theatre Institute of the United States

Increasing knowledge of the U.S. theater abroad (1968, 1972, 1975) 500,000

Johns Hopkins University

Study of public policies in the arts† (1975) 35,619

Plan for joint public/private sector support of arts in Baltimore† (1975) 25,686

National Committee for Cultural Resources

Developing recommendations for a national policy in support of the arts† (1975, 1976) 100,000

New Dramatists Committee (New York)

Grants-in-aid for playwrights (1958) 119,153

For young directors to observe and study the work of first-rank directors (1958) 36,349

New York University

Training voice teachers to work with actors in black theater companies (1968) 22,869

Development of new dramatic materials (1969) 5,000

Newark Community Center of the Arts

General support† (1970, 1975) 400,000

Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Center (Waterford, Connecticut)

Summer institute for young critics in the arts (1968, 1969) 18,458

Workshop in theatrical communication conducted by the National Theatre of the Deaf (1970) 15,290

Demonstration of theater training and style (1973, 1975) 143,000

Theatre Communications Group (New York)

Improving professional standards in the theater (1964, 1969, 1971, 1972) 2,208,420

Theatre Development Fund (New York)

Voucher program for off-off Broadway groups and experimental ticket sales outlet (1973) 62,000

Development services program (1976) 100,000

† Includes all performing arts

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Americans for Indian Opportunity

Training of the American Indian Theater Ensemble (1972) \$ 50,000

Dallas Theater Center

Support of a minority theater group (1971) 18,250

East-West Players (Burbank, California)

Development of ethnic materials for the theater (1968) 38,500

Free Southern Theater (New Orleans)

Performance and training opportunities for young blacks (1968, 1973) 320,600

George Washington University

Workshop for Careers in the Arts for minority high school students† (1973, 1976) 524,500

Harlem School of the Arts

Training black students in dance and theater (1969) 262,000

Cash reserve grant‡ (1975) 600,000

Henry Street Settlement (New York)

Training workshop in theater arts for minority youth (1973) 150,000

Inner City Cultural Center (Los Angeles)

Development of ethnic materials for the theater (1968) 31,760

Cash reserve grant (1971, 1974) 1,238,700

Phelps-Stokes Fund

Developing an American Negro theater company and apprenticeship program (1964) 16,006

Studio Watts Workshop (Los Angeles)

School of Drama and School of Art and Design (1969) 71,225

Yale University

Scholarship aid to black students at Yale School of Drama (1968, 1971) 299,399

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS AND FOUNDATION-MANAGED PROJECTS

Administrative interns

Awards for training forty-three administrators in the performing arts (1962-1969) 328,664

Technical and research assistance in arts management ‡ (1975) 500,000

Economic survey of performing arts

National survey of the economics and financing of performing arts in the United States† (1970-1974) 1,280,150

Juilliard School

Book by Michael St. Denis on training a theatrical ensemble (1966) 22,500

Research and writing by John Houseman on development of theater and film in the United States (1970) 10,000

New American drama

Awards to encourage the production of new American plays (1976) 600,000

† Includes all performing arts

‡ Includes all arts

Playwrights and resident theaters

Awards for playwrights to work with directors of resident theaters (1964) \$ 92,718

Production intern program

Stipends for disadvantaged students to train at Brooklyn College as theater technicians (1970, 1971) 129,626

Program for poets and fiction writers

Fellowships for twenty-six poets and novelists to spend a year in residence with a theater or opera company (1960-1965) 227,305

Program for scenic design

Honoraria for three sculptors and painters to prepare scenic designs for theater and opera companies (1961) 1,500

Theater directors

Grants-in-aid to seventeen theater directors to advance their professional development (1959, 1960) 157,300

Scholarship and criticism

Fellowships for reporters, editors, and critics in visual and performing arts (1964, 1965) 42,410

Studies in creative arts

Fellowships for writing and research on aspects of theater and stagecraft (1960, 1963) 54,100

Travel and study awards

To assist the development of men and women in the theater arts field (1959-1976) 365,958

TELEVISION DRAMA

See Ford Foundation Activities in Noncommercial Broadcasting 1951-1976. 26 pp., available from the Foundation's Office of Reports, 320 East 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.